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Public Information Office: +93 (0)70-234-236 x4369
E-mail: kabulusaidinformation@usaid.gov
<http://afghanistan.usaid.gov>

FACT SHEET

Afghanistan Polio Eradication Initiative

OVERVIEW

Afghanistan is one of four countries still suffering from active transmission of the polio virus. Although polio cases decreased after 2001, with only four cases reported in 2004, the deteriorating security situation has been accompanied by a rise in infection. As of October 2009, there have been 23 new reported polio cases in Afghanistan, most occurring in the southern region. Major challenges in the south, such as safety concerns for vaccinators and monitors, a climate of fear, and frequent population movement between polio-endemic areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, make accessing and vaccinating at-risk children difficult.

To monitor the occurrence of polio, USAID is supporting the Afghanistan Polio (AFP) Surveillance Network, which is operating at the national, regional, provincial, and district levels. Community-based monitoring is the hallmark of the system. Working with local NGOs, the AFP Network includes more than 10,000 reporting volunteers (mullahs, traditional healers, pharmacists, and shrine keepers), who are linked to nearby health facilities. The network gathers essential information about polio risk and vaccination, helping to identify needed community interventions and vaccination campaigns.

ACTIVITIES

- **Introducing innovative anti-polio measures in the southern region** – Prevents the spread of polio to other regions of the country and to neighboring polio-free countries. The initiative operates at the local level using a variety of strategies to vaccinate children in high-risk areas in a short timeframe. The project also collaborates with NATO/ISAF forces, hires access negotiators to reach insecure areas, and uses UN Peace Day as a day to conduct immunization campaigns.
- **Cross border coordination** – Shares surveillance data between Afghanistan and Pakistan on a weekly basis, coordinates vaccination days, and deploys vaccination teams to cover mobile populations at the eleven border crossings.
- **Engaging health sector NGOs in high-risk districts of Kandahar and Hilmand provinces** – Works to minimize the security challenges and improve campaign quality, and addresses the fatigue of health workers due to frequent campaigns.
- **Supporting routine coverage** – Conducts district level planning and surveillance to identify gaps in immunization coverage; collects data on measles and neonatal tetanus; and reports outbreaks of measles, pertussis, and Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever from the field.

RESULTS

- More than 2,500 children are vaccinated daily at 11 border crossings.
- 84 percent of Afghans live in areas free of circulating polio virus.
- Adequate immunity levels achieved in most parts of Afghanistan, indicated by vaccination status reports and other data.
- Increased the number of National Immunization Days from four to six to maintain immunity levels throughout the country.

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